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MINIATURES

By

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FOREWORD
to
MINIATURES

In "Miniatures" we shall try to recall and recapture some of the "little pictures" presented in the day by day experiences of that gallant company of men and women who, in the early days of this century, came to Fort Saskatchewan and district, to make homes for their families in the new land. Of the vision, faith, courage, and endurance they brought to the task, of the achievements in spiritual, cultural, and material values they wrested from what would seem to be unpromising sources.

Perhaps as we read, and remember, we may be called to render a fuller measure of recognition and a truer appreciation of their building.

But few of this company are here today. Many of them sleep, tired hands resting from their labors, in a quiet, lovely God's Acre on the edge of the old Fort. Their Spirits, faring forth, have found the far horizons and new frontiers they ever sought.

Their works live after them, and we who follow rise up and call them Blessed!

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MINIATURES

How shall we present the rich background of those early days? The many people and factors that enter into the picture? It is not possible to mention each and every one who had a part: suffice it that we touch the highlights and let them shed their light on the whole.

My earliest recollection of Fort Saskatchewan in the spring of 1900 is Main Street, now Government Street, flanked on the west by the picturesque, red-roofed, white-washed quarters of "G" Division, R.N.W.M.P., seventy men in the detachment, Major Constantine O.C.

St. George's Church on its present site, then, as now, quaint and lovely in its setting and furnishing, with several brass memorial tablets to early members on its wall.

Rev. Geoffry D'Easum was rector, also serving the country parishes of Agricola and Partidge Hill, where service was held in the old schoolhouse.

The possessor of a fine tenor voice, we call still hear him leading the congregation in the grand old hymns at Evensong. Rev. D'Easum, in addition to being a first-class parson, was a gifted violinist.

Many tales he would tell of his experiences in country parish work, of driving out to Agricola in winter, in a horse and sleigh, taking along his own kindling wood, finding the little church locked, forcing a window, climbing in and getting the fire going before the parisoners arrived. Then in summer, with the same faithful nag hitched to a buckboard, and after

negotiating numerous sets of "bars" en route, to get hopelessly stuck in the mud on the trail that skirted the edge of Walker's Lake, have the whiffle-tree break and the horse walk out of the shafts, leaving him sitting in the buckboard holding one rein!

Methinks in the Hereafter there will be something special in the way of "Mansions" for pioneer clergymen.

We journey along Main Street and come to a neat white frame church with Heavenward-pointing spire, which had taken the place of the little log church earlier built by willing hands. This is the Presbyterian Kirk and Manse, with Rev. Alexander and Mrs. Forbes in charge. Hailing from Forfarshire, Scotland, they are a worthy couple. Mrs. Forbes was a nurse who had trained to go to the Mission field in Old Calabar in Africa, but came instead to Canada, as mistress of the Manse in Fort Saskatchewan.

A veritable Mother In Israel to the sick and needy in the new settlements, her winning personality and unselfish, loving service to others made her beloved by all.

In 1910 Rev. and Mrs. Forbes moved on to Grande Prairie, traveling by sleigh and caboose. There they established a church and Mission Hospital, always pioneers for the Kingdom. In August, 1917, Mrs. Forbes passed to her Reward. In First United Church in the Fort there hangs a tablet to the loved memory of Agnes Sorel Forbes. Dr. Forbes, still hale and hearty, is, we believe, living at Teeswater, Ontario.

On the corner where Highway "15" swings east stood the red brick Mansion House, in charge of Frank Mariaggi, a Sicilian.

Across the corner, still going north, where the cenotaph now stands in the Soldiers' Memorial plot, was the general store of Henry Wilson and his nephew, W. L. Wilkin, of the present Wilkin Insurance firm, Edmonton. This store was later destroyed by fire.

Farther north was a small wooden building which housed the Post Office and Telegraph Office, with Mr. W. Campbell post master and Bill Hobbs doing the trick at the "Key". Farther along the street than the present Foster Block was the general store of Shera and Co., the late Mr. W. G. Shera and his nephew, Jack, J. W. of Edmonton.

The Shera store, for many years filled an important role as business, social, and political center, where townsmen and country folk foregathered round the big stove, discussed and settled to their satisfaction, matters affecting them locally and in the wider field of the State. There Mr. Shera sold my husband, then a lanky youth of eighteen summers, his first suit of clothes, the money for which he had earned by "taking a man's place" in the harvest field.

The only house between the Shera store and the river was that of Alec Dewar, who ran the grist mill, the Fort's only industry at that time. (We hadn't a jail in those days). The mill later burned down and was not rebuilt.

Dennis Avenue was the other street. There were no sidewalks. About 1902, Rev. A. R. Aldridge and family arrived from Manitoba to build a Methodist Church. For the first summer, services were held in the unfinished parsonage, the house now occupied by Mr. Joe Latour.

One Monday morning, sans any ceremonial laying of the corner stone, Mr. John Alton, Mr. Jot Carscadden and Rev. Aldridge began the building of the church. This was completed that summer by volunteer help. This is the present First United Church.

We recall a box social held in the parsonage in the winter of 1902. Several sleigh-loads drove in from the country. Mr. Jack Shera was chairman and recounted, by request, some of his experiences while he was a prisoner of Louis Riel in the Uprising of 1885. Mrs. Dewar recited. Mrs. Dr. Berry sang very sweetly that old ballad "I Cannot Sing the Old Songs", then a little girl of about nine years, in a pretty red dress, buttoned down the back, started off bravely to say a "piece" but, frightened at sight of all the strange faces, forgot, lines and had to be excused. Her name was Karyl Baetz! The writer also recited -- one of those effusions that began thus: "Swiftly sped a bannered steamer, with a gay excusion crowd. . ." Remember that sort of "piece"?

Then followed in quick succession the erection of Dr. Bennet's house, where Mr. Laurie Diamond now lives. Another building to house the branch of the Union Bank, Mr. Denham McLean, Manager. This was near the present "Record" office. Upstairs were Lodge rooms.

On the site of the present Texaco station was a livery barn, owned by Messrs. Stirret and Larose, later taken over by "Nobby" White and Walter Bilton. Across the corner to the east was Mr. Arnold Carscadden's Hardware. To the west of the barn was Fred White's jewelry store and Mr. Eugene Clark's

implement store.

The first approach to a public meeting place was, we believe, the Langworthy Hall, over the present Massey Harris shop. Then a few years later Simmons Hall was built by Mr. Dave Simmons. Many a matron in town and country made her first bow to Society, with a capital "S", at a ball in Simmons Hall.

The Police, Oddfellows' and the Batchelors' Ball were the highlights of the social season.

Directly across the river from the Fort was the little French-Canadian village of Lameraux. Nestling on the north bank of the mighty Saskatchewan, it had the appearance and quaint old world charm of a "habitant" village lifted out of the heart of old Quebec and set down in Alberta.

Transportation to Edmonton was provided by a stage, which made the round trip each day. Charlie Stewart and George Sutter were stage drivers. A ferry operated below the hill to take rigs and passengers across the river.

Mr. Frank Featherstonehaugh had a saw mill on the river bank near this point.

At the southwestern end of the town was a picnic ground and racetrack, where many an exciting horse race and ball game was staged.

About 1903-04 the Elk livery barn was built. It stood on the site of the present Manual Training School. Also the Bay Horse livery in the northeast section. These were run by Messrs. Dave, Els, and Philip Simmons.

Among the earliest arrivals in the Fort, long before the time

of which we write, were Mr. and Mrs. James Graham and family, who traveled from Winnipeg in a Red River Cart. Ed Graham was then a baby in arms. Their first home here was in a tent.

Mrs. Graham was one of the most gracious and charming women we have known. We have heard her tell of the good neighbors she found among the native women. She had brought some calico with her, and after the long hard journey needed a housedress. Mrs. Graham was not much of a seamstress and she did not have a pattern. As she sat one day with the material on her knee, a native woman came into the tent and asked if she could help. Mrs. Graham said she'd like to make a dress but was afraid to tackle it. The woman said, "Get up, walk to the door; now turn around." She eyed Mrs. Graham carefully, picked up the print, went out, and returned the next evening with the finished dress, and Mrs. Graham said, "It fitted beautifully."

Among those here at this time were Dr. and Mrs. Sweetapple, police veterinarian, Dr. and Mrs. P. Aylen, police doctor, Dr. and Mrs. Berry, the Adamsons, Terciers, Dubus, Turners, Lameroux's, Chobots, Diamonds, Fishers, Coutts, Ross Brothers, Bauchanans, Ashers, Morets, Jim Harvey, Dr. Hamden, dentist, Archie L'Amie, T. J. Carscadden, A. T. Chambers, Pete Gordon, R. Gordon Fraser, Wilmoroths, Baetz's, "Nobby" White, Atkinsons, H. E. Daniel, Hiram Staples, Jack and Oscar Bowden, Dr. Bennet, Dr. Donald, Dr. Turner, W. J. Foster, and others.

Coming out of town to the south was Jimmy York, an ex-Mountie, after whom Yorkville was named, Ab Shackleton, later married to Miss Annie Clark of Horse Hills, Mr. Spallin, Bill Simmons, John McLellan, Jot Carscadden, Major Dawson, the Peters family, Hugh Irwin, Bill Walker, Jim Atkinson, Dr. Tofield, Art Walker, Jim Porte

T. J. Pearce, T. H. Attewell, A. Peebles, an ex-Mountie, Ralph Smith, Joe Smith, John Henry Kennedy, George Armitage, John Whitson, Robert Houston, Charles Flintoff, John and Robert Hare, Fred and Peter Rye, Sid Pearce, J. T. Wallis, George Davies, Kellys, Dozes, John Flukers, Gaufs, Krebs, Ripples, Kulaks, Thomases, Mohrs, Beckers, Fords. These all settled here fifty to fifty-five years ago.

Then in 1900 came Joseph Alton and Sons, Hortons, Osbaldestons, George and Duncan Cranston, Lawrences, Richard Gordon, Cooks, Karrans, Stuckeys, Cordorans, Goulds, Tom Magee, John Webb, Reids, Burnetts, R. J. Torrie, and others. The newcomers lost no time beginning their search for land. There were no roads, only trails, ziz-zagging across the prairie, dodging around sloughs and clumps of brush, so a tent or a log shack with a sod roof could be put up for a shelter.

Sometimes in a wet spell these sod roofs leaked badly! and we were driven to seek shelter under one of the three shingled roofs in the district, those of Robert Houston, Peter Rye, and Charles Flintoff.

We recall a May morning in 1900 when, by all the accepted standards of what May mornings -- famed by poets, "O that we two were maying," etc., etc. -- should measure up to, fell far short of advance notices. On this particular morning, after a sleepless night when the sod roof on our habitation had leaked all night, seeing Mrs. John Alton with her eight months old baby in her arms, sitting up in bed under an umbrella, the younger members of the family under another umbrella in another bed and enjoying it all hugely, while Father Alton splashed around and prepared some breakfast from what he could salvage from the contents of the breadbox (which

had a tight cover), and the egg basket, afterward hitching up a team, bundling us into the wagon and taking us over to Mr. Peter Rye's. Before noon of that day three other families, also flooded out, arrived. It was crowded quarters all right, but bed and board and a warm welcome awaited us in this hospitable house.

Then, in a day or so returning home to find water still dripping from the roof, presenting a sodden, woe-begone picture of things in general.

With somewhat "dampened" ardor but undaunted courage, we set about the task of getting things out to dry. Presently the sun shone again, a fine breeze sprang up and that experience was marked up as one that might be expected in a new country, and was accepted as such.

The home of Bill Walker, Agricola, was a central point for landseekers. Frank Walker, later M.L.A., then a lad of eighteen or twenty, often a guide to the newcomers. They tell of Frank digging a well on his father's farm, over a hundred feet deep and not a foot of cribbing the whole way. The hole grew so crooked, in process of digging, that when the digger looked up he could not see daylight, and the tragedy was that after all it was a dry hole!

Settlers were sometimes at a place where it was difficult to find the price of a bag of flour. There wasn't much to sell off the new farms yet. Butter was worth twelve to fourteen cents a pound, eggs, eight cents to twelve cents a dozen in trade. We recall a Saturday evening, one of the farmers' wives taking eight pounds of butter in to the Fort. The butter was needed at home, but the need for soap for the family wash was even greater. This farm mother had fifteen cents in her purse that night, all the cash on hand. When she inquired the price of butter the storekeeper said gruffly, "Twelve cents a pound and we're not buying any. We're full up. Is

there anything I can get for you?" With a sinking heart, but with an aplomb nothing short of magnificent, the lady looked casually round the store and said, "I think not, thank you," then as if it had just occurred to her, "Oh, yes, I believe I'll take two cakes of Comfort Soap." She said goodbye to the precious fifteen cents, but she had the laundry soap, and the children had butter on their bread that week.

Boys and girls were lucky if they had stout leather boots to wear to school in the winter. Rubbers or overshoes were out of the question. Two pairs of overalls had to take the place of underwear for the boys in many cases. We have known of youngsters trudging to school in their hard boots, crowding around the big "box" stove to warm up and getting so warm in spots (and perhaps too for lack of proper insulation on these spots) that when they sat down in their school seats they bounded up again as though they had bee shot! They were mostly a hardy, healthy bunch of youngsters. They had to be, to survive.

There was no building going on, and no one had any money to pay for help if there had been. No farm help was needed, as there was but a small acreage under cultivation on the new farms. Those who had a little grain to sell or to trade for flour, teamed the oats to the Brackman-Ker Milling Company in Strathcona for fifteen cents a bushel for oats and barley. The trip, a round fifty miles or better, was made in one day; then rest the horses one day and go again,. Prices did not warrant staying over in town.

Some of the men turned to washing gold on the Saskatchewan River, others got out wood and sold it to the Police Barracks for fuel.

Living was plain and wants were few, and definitely lacking

in many of the problems that make life today a complex matter.

Saturday was the great night of the week. It meant a good neighbor would bring the "mail" from the Fort, with a can of coal oil to boot. The lighting problem was solved for the next week.

The coming of the weekly mail meant the beloved Family Herald and Weekly Star would be on hand. With something for every member of the family. It was an unwritten but understood law that the grown-ups had priority rights here, so the young fry waited their turn with what patience they could muster.

Mr. John Whitson, mentioned earlier in these "little pictures" was one who, with his large family, moved in from North Dakota to the Partridge Hill district about 1891. As a young man of twenty-six he had had his right arm severed near the shoulder in an accident in a horse-power thresher. Notwithstanding this handicap, he "freighted" with a team and sleigh all one winter from Edmonton to Athabasca, a haul of one hundred miles.

Along about 1902-03 a number of settlers banded together and hauled lumber by sleigh from John Walter's yard in Edmonton to what is now the city of Lloydminster, about two hundred miles, to build houses for the colony of settlers that came out from England under Bishop Lloyd. This was the original Barr Colony.

This trip involved hardship and danger, crossing the plains in the bitter winter weather, no settlements where they could put up at night. The only stopping place en route was that run by Harry Bottel, in what is now the town of Vermilion.

The men carried lighted lanterns under the horseblankets to keep themselves warm on the sleighs, ate frozen bread and pork, and drank plenty of good strong tea made from snow water, in a pail, over a fire at the side of the trail, slept at night in the same

stable that sheltered their horses. Today, as motorists speed along Highway "15" in streamlined luxury, we wonder if they spare a thought to the hardy pioneers who blazed the trail that they might travel thus.

The men and women of this period had before them the vision of the years, when their homes ould be secured to them in this new land of promise. They marched together and faced each day with stout hearts and high courage. Many times they had need of these qualities. In every community there was evident a fine spirit of neighborly helpfulness and cooperation.

Such kindness shown in sickness, or when death entered a home. Babies weren't born in hospitals. There weren't any hospitals, just the good offices of a capable "Grandma" to head a welcoming committee to greet a tiny newcomer.

When a mother was taken from her family we have known of the kind though unskilled hands of neighbors that fashioned the rude casket, of a neighbor woman cutting up her prized white petticoat, brought from the East, to line the same, and have seen the little funeral procession wending its way by wagon over the frozen trails to Edmonton on a cold March day. What resourcefulness in face of emergency and danger. We recall Mrs. Bob Houston. With the men folk away threshing she noticed one evening some of the cattle seemed to be sick with what she thought was "black-leg". Mrs. Houston had heard if they were bled they would not succumb to the malady. She got an axe and cut off their tails. They bled alright, and there was no fatalities from black-leg or any other cause.

As a young woman, back in North Dakota, Mrs. Houston had plunged into the Red River and rescued her sister's son from drowning.

Raymond Wallis, youngest son of Mrs. and Mr. J. T. Wallis,

about six years old at this time, one day was chopping a piece of wood in the yard when the axe glanced and neatly slicked off the end of his thumb. He ran crying to the house, to his mother, who examined the thumb and asked him where the other piece was. Raymond replied, "It's out on the block by the sawhorse." His mother gave him a push and said, "Run and get it." The little lad hot-footed it to the yard. In the meantime, an inquisitive old "biddy" with a flock of chickens around her, had seen the tid-bit on the block, and picking it up was running off with it just as Raymond got there. He took the severed thumb from the hen, ran back to his mother, who put it carefully in place, bandaged it well, and there was no more heard about it.

"Grandma" Osbaldeston yawned prodigiously one Sunday morning. The unexpected result was a "dislocated" jaw. She found herself unable to speak or to close her mouth. The family in consternation dispatched Bert, the eldest son, with a team and wagon twelve miles to the Fort to bring Dr. Donald, who had lately arrived to open a practice. When he came, he was unable to set the dislocation, so another team was got ready. This time Joe Rye drove Dr. Donald in and brought out Dr. Aylen, who, to the relief of "Grandma" and the rest of the family, after a lapse of about twelve hours, soon put things to right.

About this time another young doctor came from Nova Scotia to settle in the Frt, Dr. G. H. Turner. One of his earliest patients was the ten year old daughter of Mr. and Mrs.Peter Rye, who was ill, following an attack of pleurisy. Pus had gathered on her lung, and Dr. Turner decided to remove one or more pieces of rib to allow drainage. This he proceeded to do, performing the delicate operation on the kitchen table in the farm home. His only assistant, and, he

said, "a capable one," was Mrs. John Alton. The operation was highly successful.

Old Timers still talk of the Big Parry Sound picnic held in the Fort in June, 1899. An ox was barbecued for the occasion, sports for all and a platform for dancing.

Among those who started out for the picnic was the Cook family from Partridge Hill. They had a small organ in the wagon, which was to help in furnishing the music for dancing.

Creeks were high at this season. In fording the creek near Guy Armstrong's place the water was so deep and the current so swift it floated the wagon-box right off the wagon, gear, passengers, organ, and all went down the stream a quarter of a mile before they were rescued, but they arrived at the picnic none the worse for their boatride except that the organ was a bit "wheezy".

Mr. Sidney Pearce came to the Partridge Hill district from Magnetewan, Ontario, a year ahead of his family. He located his farm and that summer proceeded to dig a well. He dug industriously for a day or two, then on the evening of the second day found he was down too deep to climb out. He was working alone and had no ladder. With the prospect of spending the night and possibly the rest of his life in that well, he started to call lustily for help. Several hours later George Wallis, a neighbor, walking home from his farm farther east, heard the calls for help and came to the rescue of Mr. Pearce.

A colorful character of those days was old "Bill" Johnston, father of the late Bob Johnston of Good Hope, whose ready Irish wit was more than a match for would-be smart alecs. Bill drove a team of buckskin cayuses, so thin were they folks said they had to "stand twice to make a shadow", hitched to a dilapidated buckboard.

One day as he drove down Main Street in the Fort a couple of Mounties were standing on the corner. Seeing the skinny team, and thinking to take a "rise" out of the old man, one of them shouted, "Hey, old man, what do you feed those horses?" Quick as a flask, old Bill came back, "Barrels, you damn fool. Can't you see the staves?"

As soon as the newcomvers were settled, they turned their thoughts to the building of schools and places to worship. These were often in humble surroundings, but the quality of worship did not suffer on this count. Lay preachers, "students", and regular ministers ministered to the spiritual needs of the people.

In 1901 a Ladies Aid Society was organized in Partridge Hill. The first president was Mrs. R. J. Torrie. They began the task of raising funds to build a Presbyterian Church. Rev. A. Forbes was minister, holding services in the old school house.

In 1903, in June, the present church was formally opened and dedicated in June, 1943, the fortieth anniversary of the opening was observed. Among the guest preachers present was Rev. Aldridge of Calgary. Two of the original members of the Ladies Aid were present. Mrs. Jos. Alton of Lamont and Mrs. Ralph Smith, who passed away a month later.

On display, too, with its very interesting collection of names, was the Autograph Quilt "pieced" by these pioneer Christian women, as a means of raising funds.

We do not wish to give the impression that life in these early days was all hard work. On the contrary, work and play went hand in hand in well balanced proportion. For recreation there were Christmas tree entertainments, tea meetings, picnics, necktie and box socials, house dances, quilting bees, choir practice in the homes that boasted an organ. We thought nothing of traveling twenty to forty miles

to play baseball with a neighboring team. In this connection, we recall Mrs. Jot Carscadden, nee Harriet Walker of Agricola, telling of her brother Harry and she building a sleigh in the farm kitchen one winter afternoon so they could go to a Christmas tree concert at Partridge Hill that night. They got it finished in time and had a grand trip!

We do well to bow our heads and to tread softly in the presence of this company we have called up. To quote Miss Hazel Wilkinson in Magazine Review, "They toiled and suffered to clear forests that they might make homes, develop farms, establish highways, build schools, churches, that out of their struggle succeeding generations might enjoy success.

"Those sturdy pioneers fortified their homes with moral and religious ideals. They taought religion in both school and church. Whatever protection Canadian life today enjoys is due largely to the bulwarks built by the pioneers."

Their mantle falls on our shoulders. To our hands they commit the torch. Pioneers, we salute you. Hail! and Farewell!

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